

Congress of the United States

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WAXMAN CALLS ON POWELL AND UNESCO TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE DESTRUCTION OF TEMPLE MOUNT ANTIQUITIES

Washington, DC - Representative Henry A. Waxman today sent letters urging Secretary of State Colin Powell and UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura to investigate large scale bulldozing and destruction of ancient archeological sites on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by the Waqf, the Muslim religious trust charged with maintaining the area.

Over the past months, police reports and photographs have confirmed that the Waqf permitted construction crews to indiscriminately use jack hammers, tractors, stone cutters, and other heavy machinery in digging a massive hole more than 50 meters long, 25 meters wide, and 12 meters deep, in the area commonly known as "Solomon's Stables." No archeologists were allowed to oversee the excavation and the Israeli Antiquities Authority has been denied access to inspect the site since October 2000.

Representative Waxman said, "There is already an escalating trend of Arab leaders endorsing Holocaust denial. The Waqf appears to be participating in a calculated assault on Jewish heritage, Jewish history, and Jewish culture, that will only get worse if we ignore it."

More than 1,500 tons of earth from the site have been moved to the Kidron Valley garbage dump, which is now reportedly strewn with shattered artifacts from the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Temple periods dating back to the 6th Century.

Representative Waxman added, "The United States and the United Nations should be condemning this destruction as strenuously as it has objected to the Taliban's destruction of Buddhist heritage sites in Afghanistan. The Temple Mount is the crossroads of world religion and the Waqf and the Palestinian Authority must be held accountable for supporting this desecration."

In his letter to UNESCO, Representative Waxman also expressed disappointment at the decision of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) to co-host an upcoming conference on Two Thousand Years in the History of Architecture with the Palestinian Authority. As the letter states, "UNESCO and ICOMOS should be leading the international community in boldly condemning the sabotage and destruction of archeological sites instead of endorsing an entity that is supporting the Waqf's violations."

UNESCO and ICOMOS are the international organizations that oversee the protection of World Heritage Sites. The Old City of Jerusalem has been on the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger since 1982.